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ABSTRACT

This policy brief was written to provide the North Carolina State Board of Education with a research summary on the provision of rewards to high-performing school districts. A 1988 study of state accountability systems across the United States suggested that maintaining an appropriate balance between state oversight of performance and local improvement in performance required a proper mix among rewards, sanctions, and technical assistance (Office of Educational Research and Improvement Study Group, 1988). The Study Group recommended that state accountability systems rewarding high performance: (1) be based on an agreed-upon definition of high performance; (2) be based on multiple indicators; (3) be aligned with state or district goals; and (4) contain a broad range of programs and incentives. To the latter recommendation, this report adds support for experimental programs, targeted staff development grants, and support for targeted technical assistance in high-achieving districts that show improvement or in low-achieving districts that have promising projects. (LMI)

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NORTH CAROLINA EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

POLICY BRIEF

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This is the first issue of the North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center's Policy Brief series. The purpose of this series is to provide the North Carolina State Board of Education with summaries of information related to educational policy initiatives that may affect educational policy and practice in North Carolina. Policy Brief bulletins will be issued quarterly and as requested by the State Board. Additional information about the topic described in the Policy Brief may be obtained by contacting the Center.

PROVIDING REWARDS TO HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A 1988 study of state accountability systems across the United States suggested that maintaining an appropriate balance between state oversight of performance and local improvement in performance required a proper mix among rewards, sanctions, and technical assistance (OERI State Accountability Study Group, 1988).

Rewards are a policy option designed to maintain and encourage high performance. Performance-related rewards vary from simple recognition to substantial resources and actions. Rewards related to performance used by states include: (a) recognition, commendation, (b) extension of time between accreditation visits, (c) priority for training of school personnel, (d) waiving of state regulations, and (e) financial rewards, sometimes in the form of competitive grants to support innovation; sometimes as a reward for past achievement.

As for sanctions, there is little direct research evidence regarding the impact of rewards as part of a state accountability system; however, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina all noted that a surge in school and district morale has accompanied recognition or rewards for schools that are doing well.

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The Study Group recommended that systems rewarding high performance:

1. be based on an agreed upon definition of high performance, e.g., an absolute standard, comparison with other schools, or significant improvement over time,

2. be based on multiple indicators, e.g., measures of higher order skills and writing ability, course enrollments including advanced placements, proportion of students meeting university entrance requirements, proportion of vocational students meeting academic standards, and distribution of performance among varying student groups,

3. be aligned with State or district goals, and

4. contain a broad range of programs and incentives, e.g., cash awards, less frequent State or local monitoring, release from some State regulations, and resources to use in assisting other schools. To this set we would add support for experimental programs, targeted staff development grants, and support for targeted technical assistance in districts that are high achieving, improving, or low achieving but with proposals or projects for improvement that seem promising.

Information contained in this Policy Brief was summarized from:

Fullan, M. (1990). The meaning of educational change (2nd ed). New York: Teachers College Press.

Knapp, M.S. & Shield, P. (1991). Better schooling for the children of poverty: Alternatives to conventional wisdom. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

OERI State Accountability Study Group. (1988). Creating responsible and responsive accountability systems. Washington, D.C.: Programs for the Improvement of Practice, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

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